

NASH

COUNTRY FOR LIFE | JUNE 15, 2015

Country Weekly

NEW LOOK!

ON THE
ROAD WITH:

*Kelsea
Ballerini
& Jana
Kramer*

*Brooks &
Dunn* AND
Reba TAKE
ON SIN CITY

*Willie
& Merle*
TEAM UP
FOR NEW
ALBUM

Plus!

21

REASONS
TO LOVE
COUNTRY
MUSIC
THIS
SUMMER

NASH NEXT
SPOTLIGHT
ARTIST
DAN + SHAY
Inside

ON
THE
HUNT

Sam Hunt
opens up
about fame, the
inspiration for
his songs and
his journey
to success



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It's amazing just how bright the stars shine this time of year – especially on stage.

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- Brad Paisley



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June 15, 2015

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Sam Hunt is the hottest thing going in country music right now. Find out how he's dealing with his sizzling success.

PLUS!

NASH
NEXT

27 DAN + SHAY

might be a mismatched pair on the surface, but they manage to make the partnership work. Find out why every day feels like Saturday to this fun-loving duo.



Sam by Jesse Dittmar/Getty Images; Dan + Shay by Jesse Dittmar/Getty Images

COUNTRY WEEKLY (ISSN 1074-3235) VOL. 22 NO. 24, IS PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY NASH COUNTRY LLC, 506 2ND AVE. SOUTH, SUITE 200, NASHVILLE, TN 37210. PERIODICAL RATES OF POSTAGE PAID AT NASHVILLE, TN, AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. EDITORIAL OFFICES LOCATED AT COUNTRY WEEKLY, 506 2ND AVE. SOUTH, SUITE 200, NASHVILLE, TN 37210. COPYRIGHT © NASH COUNTRY LLC. 2015. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. SUBSCRIPTION RATE IS \$110.00 A YEAR IN U.S. ONLY. SUBSCRIPTIONS NOT AVAILABLE OUTSIDE THE U.S. U.S. POSTMASTER AND SUBSCRIBERS: SEND ALL UAA TO OFS (SEE DMM 707.4.12.5); NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES: SEND SUBSCRIPTION ADDRESS CHANGES AND ADJUSTMENTS, WRITE TO COUNTRY WEEKLY, P.O. BOX 37463, BOONE, IA 50037-0463 OR CALL 1-877-566-5832. SUBSCRIBERS: IF THE POSTAL SERVICE ALERTS US THAT YOUR MAGAZINE IS UNDELIVERABLE, WE HAVE NO FURTHER OBLIGATION UNLESS WE RECEIVE A CORRECTED ADDRESS WITHIN ONE YEAR. FROM TIME TO TIME WE MAKE OUR SUBSCRIBER LIST AVAILABLE TO COMPANIES WHO SELL GOODS AND SERVICES BY MAIL THAT WE BELIEVE WOULD INTEREST OUR READERS. IF YOU WOULD RATHER NOT RECEIVE SUCH MAILINGS, PLEASE SEND YOUR CURRENT MAILING LABEL TO: COUNTRY WEEKLY, P.O. BOX 37463, BOONE, IA 50037-0463. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

You may have noticed some changes in *Country Weekly*. Your eyes are not deceiving you. We have completed a bit of a renovation to the magazine. First of all, we started with the name. *Country Weekly* will now be known as *Nash Country Weekly*, a small and subtle change. We've also changed our look. Our art director, Chris Allen, has spent countless hours designing the pages of the new magazine. While it's fun to create and design new pages, it is a lot of hard work and I applaud Chris for his creativity. We hope you like it as much as we do.

And while those changes are evident in this new issue of *Nash Country Weekly*, one thing that hasn't changed is our unending commitment to bringing you the inside stories on all your favorite stars. We will continue to cover the legends, today's stars and the stars of tomorrow and bring you inside their world.

To give credit where credit is due, I'd like to introduce you to the hardworking team of *Nash Country Weekly*, who will bring you all those great stories and photos you've been accustomed to seeing. We look forward to keeping you up to date on the comings and goings of your favorite stars. So check out this issue, which features the red-hot Sam Hunt among many other fun items, and let us know what you think! We love hearing from you.

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands June 15, as we hit the road with Jason Aldean and bring you inside his Burn It Down Tour.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

LISA KONICKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

FROM THE READER



Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think! Good or bad!

COLE MINING

I'd like to tell you that after the ACM Awards I was so happy to see Cole Swindell win the Best New Artist award. I really love his new single, "Ain't Worth the Whiskey," a song that has the honky-tonk country feel. Best wishes to Cole and hope to hear lots of music from him. I'm his No. 1 fan. As I always say, your magazine makes my day, keeps me going and on track. I always read *Country Weekly* every week.



CHRISTINE PARKS
Houlton, Maine

FAITH-FUL AND TERRI-FIC

@countryweekly the @TerriClark Music feature [June 1] is great! Now, she should be on the #cover!! #nudge-nudge #winkwink.



BLAKE SMITH
@blakelevismith

@FaithHill's picture is in the June 1 issue of @countryweekly—can't wait until she graces the cover of it again!



FAITH FANS FOREVER!
@FaithHill_Fans

HELLO, DOLLY!

I hope you have someone covering Dolly and Dollywood's 30-year celebration!



BRIAN C. GRAYBILL

EDITOR'S REPLY:

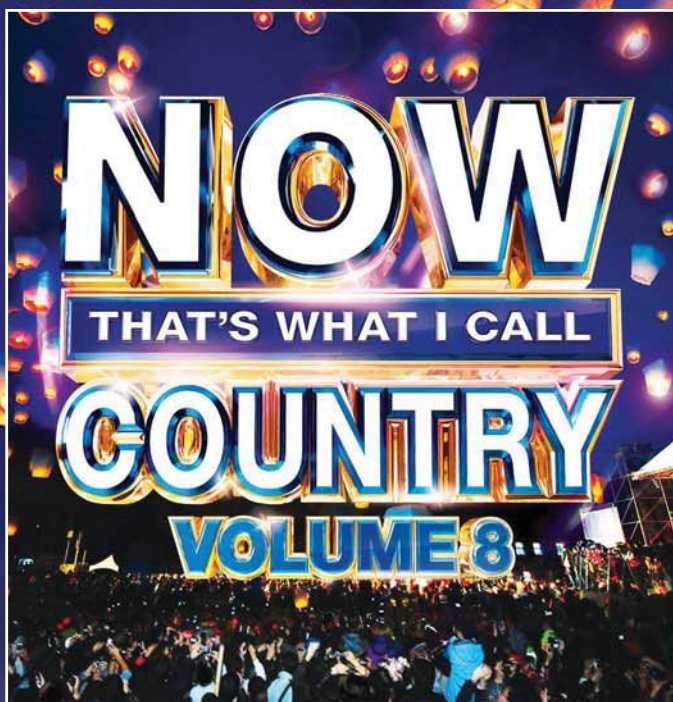
Oh we did, Brian. I hope you didn't miss our cover story two weeks ago on Dollywood's 30th anniversary.



photo by Carissa Riccardi

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL COUNTRY

VOLUME 8



**18 OF TODAY'S HOTTEST COUNTRY HITS
FOR ONE GREAT PRICE**

LUKE BRYAN "Roller Coaster"
JASON ALDEAN "Just Gettin' Started"
MIRANDA LAMBERT "Automatic"
DARIUS RUCKER "Homegrown Honey"
FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE "Sun Daze"
BRAD PAISLEY "Perfect Storm"
ERIC CHURCH "Give Me Back My Hometown"
LADY ANTEBELLUM "Bartender"
KEITH URBAN "Somewhere In My Car"

AND MORE HITS FROM:

**Sam Hunt, Jake Owen, Brantley Gilbert,
Chris Young, A Thousand Horses, Cole Swindell,
Tyler Farr, Lee Brice and Eric Paslay**

AVAILABLE JUNE 9



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FIRST TAKE

BALLIN'

RICKY SKAGGS and wife SHARON WHITE get into a summertime mood during a photo shoot for the 2016 Dailey & Vincent WaterFest Cruise.





photo by Rick Diamond/Getty Images

THE COUNTRY BREW

A SWEET TASTE OF ALL THINGS COUNTRY

Opening Act



VEGAS, BABY, VEGAS

It's getting closer! Caesars Palace in Las Vegas is gearing up for the first residency shows starring **REBA McENTIRE** and a reunited **BROOKS & DUNN**, a one-of-a-kind dream team if ever one existed. **Reba, Brooks & Dunn: Together in Vegas** as the show is billed, kicks off June 17 at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. You can also catch the spectacular show on June 19 and 20, June 26 and 27 and the holiday weekend of July 3 and 4. They'll be back for additional shows in December, although more dates could be added over the course of the year. And bet on this—you'll get a full evening of beloved country classics by two superstar acts. Check out caesars.com for ticket info.

Illustration by Drew Bardana

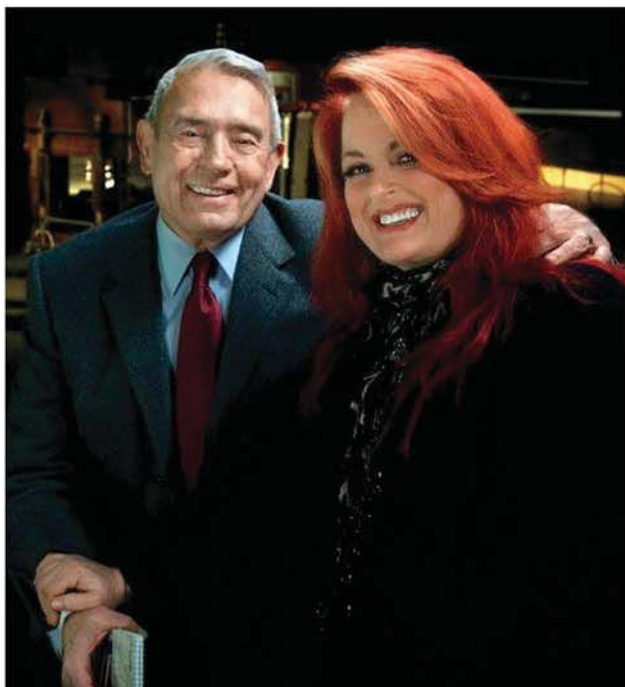


(Clockwise from above) **BANDING TOGETHER** Cancer patient Reese King, alongside The Who's Roger Daltrey, introduces **THE BAND PERRY** as Teen Cancer America's new national ambassadors at the Bridgestone Arena; **GRAMMY DAY** Coming home to a Grammy in the mail puts a smile on **CARRIE UNDERWOOD**'s face; **REAL GEMS** **AARON TIPPIN** (left) and Diamond Rio's **MARTY ROE** are moved by the spirit backstage at the Music for the Spirit showcase at the Ryman Auditorium.





(Clockwise from above) **HAVE MERCY** There is no shortage of laughs as country music star **WYNONNA JUDD** (second from left) joins the ladies of *The Talk* as a special two-day co-host; **STAR STUDD** On the set of *The Talk* with **PAUL SHAFFER** and **VANESSA HUDGENS**; **RATHER GATHERING** Wynonna sits down with **DAN RATHER** to talk songs and stories on AXS TV's *The Big Interview*.



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Frankie & Samantha by Carissa Riccardi; Mario & Kimberly by Heidi Guman/ABC; Peyton & Dierks courtesy Dierks Bentley Instagram; Eric courtesy Eric Church Twitter; Jason & Ryan courtesy Jason Isbell Instagram; Mike & Isiah courtesy Mike Fisher Instagram



(Left) **CASH MONEY** The NFL's **PEYTON MANNING** (left) joins **DIERKS BENTLEY** onstage for a special rendition of "Folsom Prison Blues" at Peyton's Celebration of Caring gala; (right) **BOOT SCOOT** There's nothing like getting **ERIC CHURCH** to autograph your cowboy boots.



(Clockwise from left) **COUNTRY BEEFCAKE** FRANKIE BALLARD tries his hand at corned beef hash with SAMANTHA LANDRUM on NASH TV's *Grits and Hits*; **BIG FLAVOR** Little Big Town's KIMBERLY SCHLAPMAN gets in the kitchen with *The Chew*'s MARIO BATALI; **CHIP OFF THE BLOCK** Carried Underwood's husband MIKE FISHER and son ISAIAH are awake from their nap; **TWO FOR ONE** Americana heavy hitters JASON ISBELL (left) and RYAN ADAMS relax backstage at the Ryman Auditorium before Ryan's sold-out show.



GET TO KNOW ...

RaeLynn

WORD OR PHRASE YOU SAY ALL THE TIME?

Pop pop.

WHAT SCARES YOU THE MOST?

Spiders.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, WHERE WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

Greece. Because I love Greek food and it's so beautiful.

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, HOW FUNNY DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

A solid 8.5.

WHAT IS THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

Playing the Opry. My Opry debut in September 2014.

WHAT'S THE ONE THING YOU WOULDN'T DO "FOR A BOY"?

I wouldn't change myself.

WHO IS THE MOST INTELLIGENT PERSON YOU KNOW?





My mom.

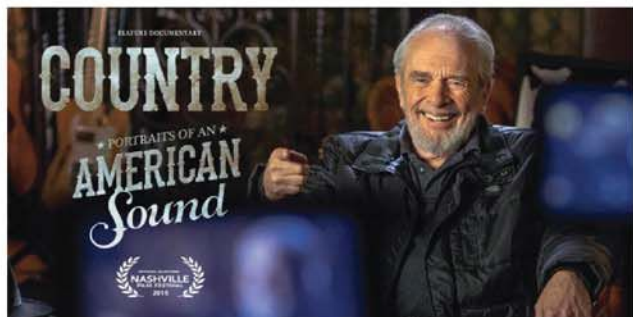
DO YOU BELIEVE IN REVENGE?

Only through songwriting.



CROSS COUNTRY

		What profession have you always admired?	What is the one thing you always wanted as a kid, but never got?	What is your favorite pizza topping?	What would you like to devote more time to?
KEITH ANDERSON		Carpenter. That's what my father did for a living.	A kiss from Sherry Walker.	I'm a meat-lovers dude—Canadian bacon, sausage, pepperoni.	Obviously family, but quiet time, my Bible prayer time.
LAUREN ALAINA		Special education teachers.	Everything my brother had!	Sausage.	Prayer.
DAN SMYERS OF DAN + SHAY		Teachers. Middle school and high school, especially.	A pet shark. That would have been cool.	Buffalo chicken.	Friends and family.
JO DEE MESSINA		Lawyer.	I didn't want for a lot.	Cheese.	Writing.



Picture Perfect

A fascinating documentary film, **COUNTRY: PORTRAITS OF AN AMERICAN SOUND**, made its world premiere at the Nashville Film Festival and received rounds of applause and raves from attendees. The movie explores the history of country music through iconic photographs taken by some of the industry's elite photographers.

DID YOU KNOW?

When **HUNTER HAYES** was 6 years old, he was cast in the **ROBERT DUVALL** film, **THE APOSTLE**. It was on that movie set that Robert gave Hunter his first guitar.



Idol & Hero



After more than a five-year hiatus of faux-guitar gaming, Activision has announced **GUITAR HERO LIVE** will be coming this fall, complete with a new guitar controller and a more contemporary selection of songs, including offerings from **CARRIE UNDERWOOD**, **THE BLACK KEYS**, **THE KILLERS**, **SKRILLEX**, **ED SHEERAN** and **GREEN DAY**. So far, Carrie is the only country music artist confirmed for the next inception of the popular video game, but more bands and artists will be announced in the coming months before Guitar Hero Live's fall debut.



COWBOY **TROY**



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PLAY "FREE BIRD"!

The latest installment of CMT's popular **CROSSROADS** franchise will be equal parts Southern and rocking, as it combines the talents of country bad boy **BRANTLEY GILBERT** and the fathers of Southern rock, Rock and Roll Hall of Famers **LYNYRD SKYNYRD**. The episode will



be filmed on the *CMT Crossroads* stage in Franklin, Tenn., and feature the artists collaborating on their respective songs. Brantley will be celebrating the Platinum Edition of his album *Just As I Am*, while Lynyrd Skynyrd has a live CD/DVD on the way titled *Lynyrd Skynyrd: One More for the Fans*. Previously, Skynyrd appeared on *Crossroads* with the similarly rocking Montgomery Gentry. Their throwdown with Brantley airs Saturday, June 27, at 10 p.m. ET.

HAT'S OFF

Stetson hats have been an iconic staple of Americana since 1865, adorning the heads of everyone from cowboys to U.S. presidents to country music's biggest stars, including **Dwight Yoakam** and **Garth Brooks**. To commemorate **Stetson's 150th anniversary** this year, RHE Hatco of Garland, Texas, is offering factory tours to the public to showcase how they have been continuously making Stetsons within the U.S. over the last 150 years. **NCW** tips its hat in appreciation of the milestone anniversary.



ALBUM RELEASE CALENDAR

JUNE 9 - JULY 24

JUNE 9



Folks Like Us
Montgomery Gentry

JUNE 9



Greyhound [EP]
Ashley Clark

JUNE 16



Dylan, Cash, and The Nashville Cats: A New Music City
Various Artists

JUNE 23



Pageant Material
Kacey Musgraves

JUNE 23



Bronco
Canaan Smith



2015 CMT MUSIC AWARDS NOMINEES

Nominations for the **2015 CMT MUSIC AWARDS** are in, and **CARRIE UNDERWOOD** leads the field with a total of five nominations. Two of those fall in



the Video of the Year category, for her song "Something in the Water" and the **MIRANDA LAMBERT** duet

"Somethin' Bad." Following Carrie are **LADY ANTEBELLUM** and **KENNY CHESNEY**, who each picked up four nods for the fan-voted show. A full nominees list follows, and make sure to tune in for the 2015 CMT Music Awards, airing live from Nashville's Bridgestone Arena Wednesday, June 10, at 8 p.m. ET.

VIDEO OF THE YEAR

- CARRIE UNDERWOOD**
"Something in the Water"
- DARIUS RUCKER**
"Homegrown Honey"
- DIERKS BENTLEY**
"Drunk on a Plane"
- FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE**
"Dirt"
- JASON ALDEAN**
"Burnin' It Down"
- KENNY CHESNEY**
"American Kids"
- LADY ANTEBELLUM**
"Bartender"
- LEE BRICE**
"I Don't Dance"
- LUKE BRYAN**
"Play It Again"
- MADDIE & TAE**
"Girl in a Country Song"
- MIRANDA LAMBERT WITH CARRIE UNDERWOOD**
"Somethin' Bad"
- SAM HUNT**
"Leave the Night On"

MALE VIDEO OF THE YEAR

- DIERKS BENTLEY**
"Drunk on a Plane"
- ERIC CHURCH**
"Talladega"
- JASON ALDEAN**
"Burnin' It Down"
- KEITH URBAN**
"Somewhere in My Car"
- KENNY CHESNEY**
"American Kids"
- LUKE BRYAN**
"Play It Again"

FEMALE VIDEO OF THE YEAR

- CARRIE UNDERWOOD**
"Little Toy Guns"
- CARRIE UNDERWOOD**
"Something in the Water"
- LEE ANN WOMACK**
"The Way I'm Livin'"
- MIRANDA LAMBERT**
"Little Red Wagon"
- RAE LYNN**
"God Made Girls"
- REBA MCENTIRE**
"Going Out Like That"

GROUP VIDEO OF THE YEAR

- A THOUSAND HORSES**
"Smoke"
- ELI YOUNG BAND**
"Dust"
- LADY ANTEBELLUM**
"Bartender"
- LITTLE BIG TOWN**
"Day Drinking"
- THE BAND PERRY**
"Chainsaw"
- ZAC BROWN BAND**
"All Alright"

DUO VIDEO OF THE YEAR

- BIG & RICH**
"Look at You"
- BROTHERS OSBORNE**
"Rum"
- FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE**
"Dirt"

FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
"Sun Daze"

MADDIE & TAE
"Girl in a Country Song"

THE SWON BROTHERS
"Later On"

COLLABORATIVE VIDEO OF THE YEAR

BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
"Lonely Tonight"

BRANTLEY GILBERT FEAT. JUSTIN MOORE AND THOMAS RHETT
"Small Town Throw-down"

JENNIFER NETTLES
feat. Brandy Clark
"His Hands"

KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
"Wild Child"

MIRANDA LAMBERT WITH CARRIE UNDERWOOD
"Somethin' Bad"

TIM MCGRAW FEAT. FAITH HILL
"Meanwhile Back at Mama's"

CMT PERFORMANCE OF THE YEAR

BOB SEGER AND JASON ALDEAN
"Turn the Page"
from CMT Crossroads: Bob Seger and Jason Aldean

BRETT ELDRIDGE
"Beat of the Music"
from CMT Ultimate Kickoff Party

JOHN LEGEND AND LEE ANN WOMACK
"You & I (Nobody in the World)" from CMT Crossroads

KATY PERRY AND KACEY MUSGRAVES
"Roar" from CMT Crossroads

KEITH URBAN
"It's a Man's, Man's, Man's World" from 2014 CMT Artists of the Year

KENNY CHESNEY
"American Kids" from Instant Jam

LADY ANTEBELLUM AND ALOE BLACC
"Wake Me Up" from CMT Ultimate Kickoff Party

LADY ANTEBELLUM AND CHRIS STAPLETON
"Drink a Beer" from 2014 CMT Artists of the Year

BREAKTHROUGH VIDEO OF THE YEAR

CHASE RICE
"Gonna Wanna Tonight"

FRANKIE BALLARD
"Sunshine & Whiskey"

KELSEA BALLERINI
"Love Me Like You Mean It"

MADDIE & TAE
"Girl in a Country Song"

RAE LYNN
"God Made Girls"

SAM HUNT
"Leave the Night On"

JUNE 23



While the Gettin' Is Good
Corey Smith

JUNE 30



About to Get Real
Easton Corbin

JUNE 30



Mixtape
JB and the Moonshine Band

JULY 17



Angels and Alcohol
Alan Jackson

JULY 17



Something More Than Free
Jason Isbell

JULY 24



The Blade
Ashley Monroe

THIS WEEK IN COUNTRY MUSIC...

2011 TUESDAY,
JUNE 12



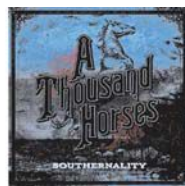
The Kind Boys of Alabama

Superstar group **ALABAMA** threw one of the biggest parties the state of Alabama had ever seen on June 14, 2011, to brighten spirits and help a great cause. Parts of the state had been devastated by recent tornadoes, and the local Alabama boys—Randy Owen, Jeff Cook and Teddy Gentry—helped organize an event called **BAMA RISING: A BENEFIT CONCERT FOR ALABAMA TORNADO RECOVERY**. And talk about an all-star show! The guest lineup featured **BRAD PAISLEY, LUKE BRYAN, LITTLE BIG TOWN, JAKE OWEN**, Alabama resident **SARA EVANS** and a number of others, all doing their part to help the state. The concert raised an estimated \$2.2 million through ticket sales, auction items and other efforts.

2015

JUNE 9: GIDDY UP

Following the success of their breakout single, “Smoke,” Southern rock troupe **A THOUSAND HORSES** will release their debut album, **SOUTHERNALITY**,



on June 9. The 13-track offering was produced by Dave Cobb (**JASON ISBELL, STURGILL SIMPSON**) and

features “Sunday Morning,” which was co-written by Rich Robinson of The Black Crowes.

JUNE 10: VIDEO PLAYER

THE CMT MUSIC AWARDS, a fan-voted awards show recognizing country music’s best video and musical achievements, will be held on June 10, with the show airing at 8 p.m. ET on CMT.

JUNE 11-14: BEST FEST

Music City’s biggest party, **CMA MUSIC FESTIVAL**, will bring droves of



fans to downtown Nashville June 11-14 to see an all-star lineup, including **ERIC CHURCH, LUKE BRYAN, ZAC**

BROWN BAND, JASON ALDEAN, LITTLE BIG TOWN, ALAN JACKSON and many more.

JUNE 11-14: ROO THE DAY

If the musical cornucopia of Manchester, **TENNESSEE’S BONNAROO MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL** on June 11-14 is on your plate, be sure to get a taste of the country music contingent of **STURGILL SIMPSON, KACEY MUSGRAVES, SHAKEY GRAVES, TRAMPLED BY TURTLES** and more.





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IN COUNTRY MUSIC." - *Billy Dean*

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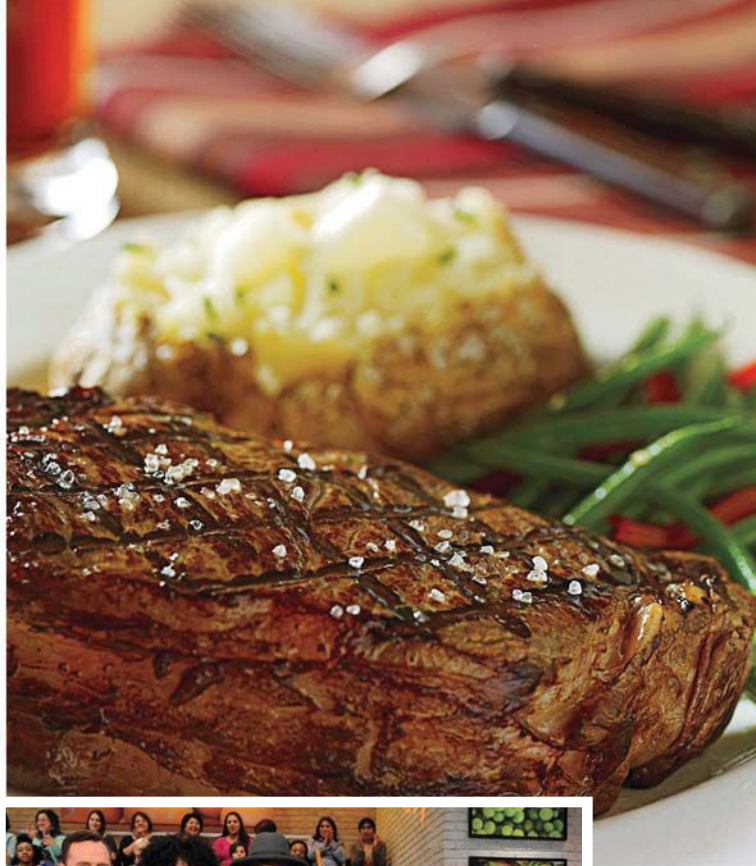


Thrill of the Grill

Big & Rich and *The Chew*'s **Carla Hall** put some flame in your game with this Southern steak recipe.

Cookout season has officially started, and to help you kick off your summertime cooking, here's a recipe for Music City Steak with Grilled Green Beans from Carla Hall, one of the expert chefs on ABC's *The Chew*. Carla recently prepared the Southern-style dish on the show with help from musical guests Big & Rich, the duo of "Big" Kenny Alphin and John Rich. Check out the recipe—and let the grilling begin!

BOB PAXMAN



(From left) Clinton Kelly, Carla Hall, "Big" Kenny Alphin, John Rich, Daphne Oz, Mario Batali and Michael Symon chew the fat on ABC's *The Chew*.

Music City Steak with Grilled Green Beans

4 New York strip steaks, about 10 ounces each and 1 ½ inches thick
 ⅓ cup Tenn. whiskey
 ¼ cup soy sauce
 ¼ cup brown sugar
 3 cloves garlic (smashed)
 2 tbsp. Dijon mustard
 2 tsp. chili flakes
 Salt and freshly ground pepper

For Grilled Green Beans:
 1 pound green beans
 2 cloves garlic (grated)
 Olive oil
 Salt and freshly ground pepper
 2 tbsp. red wine vinegar
 1 tsp. Dijon mustard

PLACE the strip steaks in a large zip-top bag. In a mixing bowl, **COMBINE** whiskey, soy sauce, brown sugar, garlic, Dijon mustard and chili flakes. **WHISK** to combine and **ADD** the marinade to the zip-top bags with the steaks. Place the bags in a baking dish and refrigerate and let marinate for at least 30 minutes or up to 8 hours. **REMOVE** the steaks

from the refrigerator 30 minutes before grilling.

PREHEAT grill to medium-high heat. Remove the steaks from the marinade and wipe off excess marinade. Generously season with salt and pepper. Place the steaks on the preheated grill and cook to desired doneness, about 5 minutes per side for medium rare. Transfer the steaks to a cutting board. Tent with foil and let stand for 10 minutes. **PREPARE** and grill the green beans (see below) while the steak is resting.

SERVE steak warm with green beans.

To prepare green beans:

In a large mixing bowl, **TOSS** the green beans with olive oil to coat, plus salt, pepper and garlic. Evenly **SPREAD** the green beans onto the grill and **COOK** about 2 minutes. Using the same bowl, **WHISK** together Dijon mustard, red wine vinegar and ¼ cup olive oil.

REMOVE the green beans directly from the grill into the bowl with the dressing and toss to evenly coat. Season with salt and pepper.

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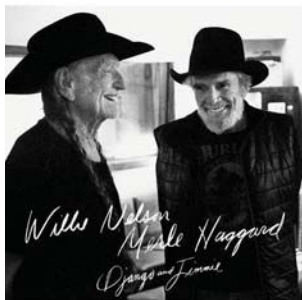
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Willie Nelson & Merle Haggard

Django and Jimmie

SONY LEGACY

A

The spirit of friendship we've come to expect from *Pancho & Lefty* looms large over *Django and Jimmie*, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard's new collaborative album—their first as a duo since 1987's *Seashores of Old Mexico*.

The first four tracks examine those friendly relationships in a number of ways; the title track is a convivial celebration of music itself, pinpointing the key formative influences for Willie (gypsy jazz pioneer Django Reinhardt) and Merle (country yodeler Jimmie Rodgers). Lead single "It's All Going to Pot" cheekily endorses marijuana legalization and lets the two pals trade lines like two college kids passing a joint.

In the ballad "Unfair Weather Friend," each expresses comfort in knowing he has someone on whom

he can count in times of need. They look outside their own friendship for "Missing Ol' Johnny Cash," reminiscing about the myth and the music of the Man in Black, then knowingly play up the lingering effects of hard living on aging bodies in "Live This Long," insisting *we'd have taken much better care of ourselves if we'd-a known*

we was gonna live this long. The whole recording exudes a warmth and intimacy that feels like being dropped onto a comfortable couch with the two legends, both of whom are in fine voice throughout. Whether they're making light of each other's crazy pasts in "The Only Man Wilder Than Me" or giving a carefree treatment to Bob Dylan's "Don't

Think Twice, It's Alright," these old friends demonstrate they've still got quite a few tricks up their sleeve.

LONG STORY SHORT:

Part origin story, part celebration of friendship, *Django and Jimmie* proves the country legends are every bit as vital as the young guns.

JON FREEMAN



WHAT'S SPINNING at NCW

We took a peek at deputy editor **JIM CASEY**'s work playlist to see what was helping him get through the day.

"In Another World"
DWIGHT YOAKAM
SECOND HAND HEART

"T for Texas"
ROBERT EARL KEEN
HAPPY PRISONER

"Life of Sin"
STURGILL SIMPSON
METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY MUSIC

"Traveling Alone"
JASON ISBELL
SOUTHEASTERN

"Wrecked"
TURNPIKE
TROUBADOURS
GOODBYE NORMAL STREET

"Nobody to Blame"
CHRIS STAPLETON
TRAVELLER

"Take Me Away"
HAYES CARLL
LITTLE ROCK

"Broken Heart Tattoos"
RYAN BINGHAM
FEAR AND SATURDAY NIGHT

"Tennessee"
CARDON SMITH
LIVE AT THE CAMP HOUSE

Mickey Guyton

Mickey Guyton – EP

CAPITOL RECORDS NASHVILLE

A

Mickey Guyton's debut self-titled EP is the perfect mix of songs to showcase her dynamic vocals that are filled with plenty of soul and passion. In addition to her debut single, "Better Than You Left Me," the four-song offering includes the pop-infused "Somebody Else Will" and the Phil Barton, Victoria Banks and Emily Shackelton-penned smash-in-waiting "Why Baby Why," which showcases the raw vulnerability that comes with trying to let go of love. The EP proves that Mickey has the passion and the pipes to build a solid career in country music.

ALANNA CONAWAY



Singles



Chris Young "I'm Comin' Over"

RCA

A-

Is it a hook-up song or is it a not-ready-to-break-up breakup song? Chris Young leaves that open to interpretation on "I'm Comin' Over," a killer ballad that showcases the rumble and range of this gifted singer that has too long been sadly overlooked in the male vocalist category at country music awards shows. **TAMMMY RAGUSA**



Corey Smith "Feet Wet"

SUGAR HILL

B+

Imagine, if you will, that glorious first day of vacation, shades on, shuffling down the boardwalk, towel over your

shoulder, cooler in your hand, relaxed and easing into it. Now set it to music. That's exactly what Corey Smith is going for in "Feet Wet," only he sings more about wading into the day than into the surf. And it becomes oh so much more bearable with an almost reggae beat and Corey's easygoing delivery. **T.R.**



Randy Houser "We Went"

STONEY CREEK

B

Randy Houser is turning up the tempo with his new progressive single, "We Went," the first cut from his as-yet-untitled upcoming album. It may be an upshift in gears, but Randy leans into the song just enough to pull off the rapid-fire swagger needed for the Bonnie and Clyde-esque theme. Add in the rockin' accompaniment, and "We Went" is primed for summer fun. **JIM CASEY**

by Tammy Ragusa

Kellie full body by Robert Hart/cbs; Kellie back by MJT/Corbis; Kellie hair & bag by Jason Merritt/Getty Images; Kellie face by Vince Flores/Startrac/photo.com; Mary Sarah Bag photos by Carissa Piccardi

What's in My Festival Bag?

WITH **Mary Sarah**

You can't expect a girl to choose just one bag when Boot Barn has so many cute ones available. So **MARY SARAH** has two to work with when she makes her national country music festival debut on June 20 at Rock the South in Cullman, Ala. And this girl is prepared!



1 LOREAL 8-HOUR LIP GLOSS IN SUNSET AND BLOOM

These are really, really great. I like lighter pink colors, especially for festivals. I think at nighttime, you can pull off a dark red or purple.

2 ADVIL

Music is great and everything, but for long periods of time, it can give you a headache. And they have the travel sizes.

3 SUNGLASSES

Cole-Haan.

4 SUNSCREEN

I use sunscreen whenever I do festivals. I get burned so easily.

5 MOPHIE

My phone dies so

quickly because I'm always taking pictures, so by the end, I don't have a camera or a phone or a way to contact someone if there's an emergency. This saves me.

6 DEODORANT

I got my dad's genes and we just sweat in hot weather. I take this with me because I'm hugging people all the time.

7 BODY WIPES

These are like a shower in a wipe. I just recently found these and love them, especially when you have to be outside. At the end of the day, you feel sticky and these are a lifesaver.

8 PEPPER SPRAY

You have to keep safe! And it's pink and cute. Girls shouldn't be alone at music festivals, it's not a good thing.

9 WISPS

I love my mini-toothbrushes.

10 ZANTAC

When I think festivals, I think I'm going to eat so much popcorn and fried food, so my trusty Zantac comes in handy.

11 RICE KRISPIES TREATS

They're a little healthier, right? I don't know, but I pick my favorite. I eat them all the time. The carbs and sugar keep you energized through the day and it's delicious.



with Wade Bowen & Randy Rogers

These barroom buddies are equals onstage for their *Hold My Beer* and *Watch This Tour*, but we did a little digging and found out that offstage Randy Rogers and Wade Bowen each have their own strong suits.

Who is the better golfer?

Wade.

Who is sloppier on the tour bus?

Wade.

Who is the better cook?

Randy.

Who is better looking?

Wade (Randy: "I'm the talent, you're the looks").

Who is the bigger instigator?

Randy.

Who can drink the most beer?

Wade.

Who can drink more vodka without getting drunk?

Randy.

Who's the better dancer?

Wade.



WADE AND RANDY recently recorded a duo album, *Hold My Beer: Vol. 1*, which landed at No. 4 on *Billboard*'s Top Country Albums chart. And more great news: the "Vol. 1" hints that there may be another collaborative project down the road.



photo by Jim McGuire/Shore Fire Media

NASH **NEXT**

NEW ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

A photograph of the musical duo Dan + Shay sitting on a concrete ledge on a beach. The man on the left, Dan, is wearing a dark quilted leather jacket over a grey shirt and dark jeans. He has dark, wavy hair and is looking towards the camera. The man on the right, Shay, is wearing a dark patterned sweater over a black shirt and dark jeans. He has dark hair and a beard, and is also looking towards the camera. They are both sitting with their legs crossed. The background shows a sandy beach and the ocean under a clear sky.

**WHERE
IT ALL
BEGAN**

DAN + SHAY
*share their musical
journey of finding
fame, success
and each other.*

THE UNDER- COVER DUO

**A CHANCE
MEETING
UNDERNEATH
THE BED
SHEETS IS ALL
IT TOOK TO
CREATE THE
BLISS OF
DAN + SHAY.**

Story by Jim Casey



If Dan Smyers, 27, and Shay Mooney, 23, were police detectives on a television drama, Dan would be the get-down-to-business bad cop (sans mustache) while Shay would be the happy-go-lucky good cop. That's not to say Dan is mean and Shay is goofy, but when they settle into the *Nash Country Weekly* office for a sit-down, there's a yin-and-yang vibe you get from the boys in blue jeans. And that dynamism is a good thing for a duo that is barely three years into their partnership—a partnership that is rooted under a set of not-so-salacious bed sheets.

On a chilly night in December 2012, Dan and Shay essentially became Dan + Shay under the

aforementioned bed sheets. Dan was having a gathering of sorts at his dilapidated Nashville pad, where bed sheets lined the living room walls and ceiling in a tentlike effort to trap heat. Shay had a friend who was attending the gathering . . . and Shay likes beer, so he joined the festivities. After introductions, the affable undercover tandem—Dan the realist, Shay the optimist—hit it off that night, drinking brews and playing tunes into the wee hours of the morning. The rest, as they say, is history.

"I found a house on Craigslist for like a hundred bucks a month, dirt cheap," says Dan, reminiscing fondly about his former abode. "I had no

money and my guitar didn't even work, so I *stole* my brother's guitar. I had been writing and doing my thing, playing in bands, struggling to get by moneywise. One night Shay came over with a buddy, and my den was covered in this tent of sheets. I couldn't afford to pay for heat, so I went to the thrift store and bought six dollars' worth of sheets and hung them from the ceiling and walls. Turned out to have a pretty cool hippie vibe, and we would huddle around in there and play songs. I heard Shay sing under there and thought he was insanely talented. We got together the next morning to collaborate."

Dan + Shay was conceived and born. Six months later, the guys had



photo courtesy WMC

a record deal with Warner Nashville. They dropped their first single, “19 You + Me,” in October 2013, and in April 2014, the duo released their debut album, *Where It All Began*, which hit No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Top Country Albums chart. It didn’t take a detective to see the simple addition of Dan plus Shay was equaling success.

But what is more impressive than the rate at which the guys found success is the rate at which they write songs. Before Dan + Shay recorded their debut album, they had written more than 100 songs together. Theoretically, Dan and Shay could have been the first artists to release a four-CD box set of greatest hits as their debut album. When you have that kind of song reservoir at your disposal, it turns out that



SMART BET

“Right after we met, Shay and I were writing over at Major Bob Publishing,” says Dan Smyers. “We were writing with another guy who said, ‘I bet you five bucks we can get this song on hold by Rascal Flatts by 6 p.m.’ First of all, I couldn’t make the bet at the time because I was so broke I didn’t have five bucks. Second, I thought it was a crazy idea. But sure enough, Rascal Flatts heard the song and put it on hold. I was excited about that, but I was really glad I didn’t lose five bucks.”

picking the tracks for the album is the hardest part. No doubt, it’s a good problem to have. Imagine Dan and Shay in the studio, going through their catalog and selecting songs like NFL executives pick former college football players during the NFL Draft. *With the first overall pick in the Dan + Shay Draft, Dan selects . . . “19 You + Me.” With the second overall pick in the Dan + Shay Draft, Shay selects . . . “Show You Off.”* And on and on it goes until the duo has their 12 songs.

“We haven’t stopped writing since meeting,” says Shay. “When it came to songwriting, we clicked immediately. We were writing two, three songs a day. We still write songs all day long. We just wrote a couple yesterday. But writing a lot is a good thing. We can pitch them to other



Dan (left) and Shay rock the house at the UNO Lakefront Arena in New Orleans in December 2014.



(Above) The guys receive plaques in honor of their gold-selling single, "19 You + Me." (Below) They celebrate Shay's 23rd birthday in Boston in December 2014.



artists, or maybe we come back to a couple of those songs for our albums down the road."

Speaking of albums down the road, the guys are currently working on their sophomore album, with a tentative plan to release a lead single later this year, and the hope is that the finished record will be ready by early 2016. In the meantime, the duo has a single climbing the charts, "Nothin' Like You," and they recently wrapped the second leg of their sold-out headlining Where It All Began Tour.

"We toured with Blake [Shelton] and Hunter [Hayes] last year, and supporting is always a privilege, but it was great to headline our own tour," says Dan. "Our fans surprised

us every night with sold-out shows. You walk onstage and the place is packed for you. It's an amazing feeling to be able to play our entire album—even the deep cuts—and have the fans singing along. It was a good headlining run for our first album. Not a lot of artists get to do that, so we are very thankful to everyone on our team and our fans."

The road-weary duo shows no signs of slowing down after their headlining tour. However, they were thankful for a three-day reprieve back in Nashville after being on the road for three months. It was just enough time to recharge their batteries and hit their favorite local watering hole—The Pharmacy Burger

URBAN RENEWAL

When the guys from Dan + Shay are not on the road or in the studio writing and recording, there's a good chance you can find them restocking their creative juices at one of their favorite Music City hot spots.

- THE PHARMACY BURGER PARLOR & BEER GARDEN
- UGLY MUG COFFEE & TEA
- ROBERT'S WESTERN WORLD
- PERCY PRIEST LAKE
- SHELBY BOTTOMS GREENWAY AND NATURE PARK



& Beer Garden (see sidebar)—before packing up their gear for a healthy dose of summer festivals.

"We're excited about our summer shows," says Shay. "They're always fun. People get excited for the festivals, and we love that. We did a few last year, doing a bunch this year. We love being outside. We'll have a cool setup with our lawn chairs, grill, footballs, cornhole boards—it doesn't get any better than traveling the country in the summer with your buddies, playing music and hanging out. It's the dream. Every day is Saturday."

Hear that? Every day is a Saturday for Dan + Shay. Now that sounds like the perfect partnership. ■

with Randy Houser

With a new album in the works and a new single, “We Went,” climbing the charts, Randy Houser has a lot to look forward to this summer. In between stops on Luke Bryan’s Kick the Dust Up Tour, the Mississippi native sat down with *Nash Country Weekly* to talk about his love for the troops, fried catfish and “Uptown Funk.”

You were on Dierks Bentley’s Riser Tour in 2014 and now you’re on Luke Bryan’s Kick the Dust Up Tour. Are the experiences similar or completely different?

They are very similar. Both of those guys are cool people. They treat you like royalty and they want you to feel at home. There’s not a big difference in that regard. I’ve really lucked out.

You do a lot of work with the troops. Why is that important to you?

The way I learned to have a really healthy respect for those guys was a trip to Iraq I did with Kellie Pickler and Jamey Johnson. I got a glimpse of what they experience. They are not only sacrificing their lives, but they are making sacrifices with their family back home. Nobody works harder than our troops, so any chance I get to help, I’m in.

It’s been two years since you dropped your last album. How’s the new music coming?

It’s coming along great. I’d say we’re about halfway done with the album. I haven’t been home much with all the touring, but we’re hoping to have new music by fall. That’s what we’re thinking in our heads.

What’s on your iPod right now that would surprise us?

Man, I love me some “Uptown Funk” right now. I can’t help it. It’s my guilty pleasure. I like having a lot of different things, so I’ve got some Lyle Lovett and Keb’ Mo’, too.

You’re a Mississippi boy, and that state has a rich musical history, from Jimmie Rodgers to Conway Twitty. Who did you listen to growing up?

Jimmie and Conway for sure.

Who makes you laugh?
Ron White. He’s become a good buddy of mine. He definitely makes me laugh.

And Hank Cochran was a huge deal to me, especially through Willie Nelson. Mississippi has such a deep musical heritage, and I’m proud to carry that torch now. I guess it’s in the water down there.

What do you miss most from back home in Mississippi?

Mainly my old friends from high school and the home cooking.

Favorite dish?

Every once in a while, I’ve got to go find a good catfish house, just to get some fried catfish. It’s not easy to find one that does it like they do it down there.

JIM CASEY



21

Reasons to Love Country Music This Summer

1  **Tin Roof**
A LIVE MUSIC JOINT

Because if you're a resident of **NASHVILLE** (or an adventurous visitor), you can count on bumping into country stars like **CHRIS YOUNG** casually drinking cold beer on the **TIN ROOF** patio.



Because country girls look so much cuter in breezy sundresses and flip-flops at **CMA MUSIC FESTIVAL** than they do in winter parkas.

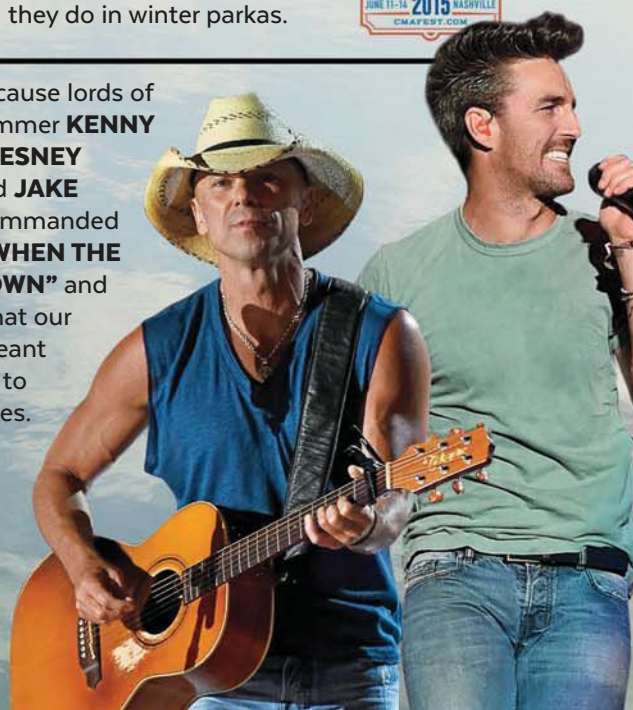


Because **LITTLE BIG TOWN'S "PONTON"** isn't just a great summer song, it's a great idea for you and 15 of your closest girl or boy crushes.

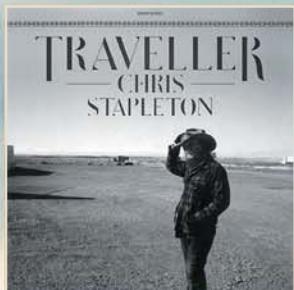


Because lords of summer **KENNY CHESNEY** and **JAKE**

OWEN hath commanded in holy texts **"WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN"** and **"BEACHIN'"** that our feet weren't meant to be enslaved to closed-toe shoes.



Because **CHRIS STAPLETON**'s soul-shaking new album, **TRAVELLER**, is the perfect soundtrack for any road trip, even if it's just to the nearest watering hole.

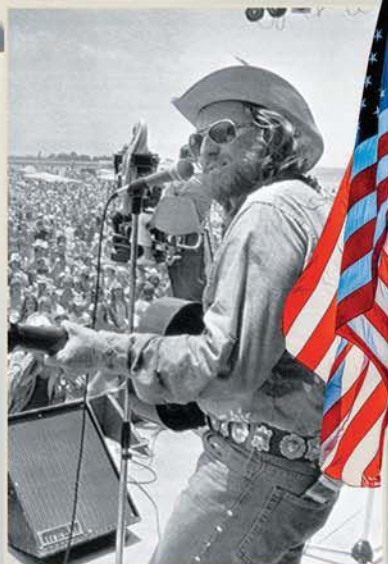


5



6

Because **WILLIE NELSON'S FOURTH OF JULY PICNIC** is back in Austin, and after a little **STURGILL, KACEY, MERLE** and **WILLIE**, you'll be hungry for mas tacos and topo chico.



8

Because **THE CADILLAC THREE**'s Jaren, Kelby and Neil will always be ready to throw down with you at a backyard barbecue, drag race or pontoon party. Or anywhere else, really.



7

Because no matter how many times we hear **LEE GREENWOOD'S "GOD BLESS THE U.S.A."** this Fourth of July, we'll still get teary-eyed when he sings, *And I'll proudly stand up . . .*

9

Because cheap domestic beer tastes better when **ALAN JACKSON'S "CHATTAHOOCHEE"** is playing in the background.



10

Because weekends mean the **CRAWFISH ARE BOILING** at Texas hot spots like **NICO'S IN KINGWOOD**, and the mudbugs and temperatures are matched in heat signature by the frighteningly good local talent that plays there.



11

Because **STEVE GOODMAN** did, in fact, write the perfect country and western song, **DAVID ALLAN COE'S "YOU NEVER EVEN CALLED ME BY MY NAME,"** which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this month.



12

Because lovely **JANA KRAMER** has an awe-inspiring tan. (Seriously, how does she do that? Asking for a friend.)



Crawfish by Daniel DeSlover/Corbis, Steve by Christopher Palk/Getty Images, FGI by Kevin Mazur/Nickelodeon, Kip by Christopher Palk/Getty Images, Derks courtesy Houston Rodeo

13

Because **FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE**'s Tyler Hubbard and Brian Kelley shouldn't have to be the only people without sleeves.



17

Because **DIERKS BENTLEY'S SOUNDS OF SUMMER TOUR WITH KIP MOORE, MADDIE & TAE** and **CANAAN SMITH** is going to be the biggest bang for your buck and you'll have some leftover cash for nachos and beer.



14

Because **ZAC BROWN BAND**'s new album, **JEKYLL + HYDE**, will move your ass from the sand to the dance floor and back again.

15

Because **WILLIE AND MERLE** are still as productive and creative as guys younger than their own children, as evidenced by **DJANGO AND JIMMIE**.



16

Because if there is a hammock in your backyard and a glass of lemonade, you have the perfect setting to listen to **BILLY CURRINGTON**'s new album, **SUMMER FOREVER**.





18

Because Nashville has a new outdoor venue—the **ASCEND AMPHITHEATER**—and **ERIC CHURCH** is the first performer, with two sold-out shows.

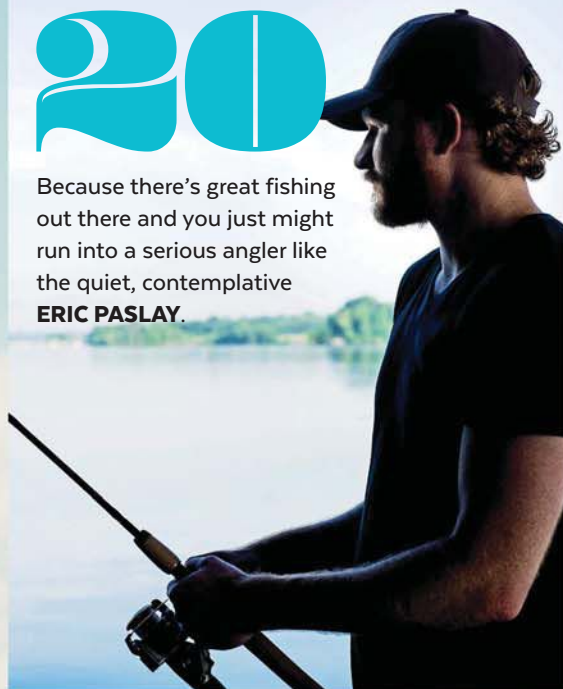


19

Because we still haven't gone swimming with **BRETT ELDREDGE**, and he's been swimming with pigs. What have they got that we don't?

20

Because there's great fishing out there and you just might run into a serious angler like the quiet, contemplative **ERIC PASLAY**.



Ascend courtesy The Greenroom PR; Brett by Staniel Cay/Whig; Eric by Tyler Andrews; Kelsea by Timothy Hatt;



21

Because **KELSEA BALLERINI**'s legs deserve to have Shakespearean sonnets written about them.

First Ever "Thomas Kinkade White Christmas"

Masterpiece Edition Crystal Snowman



THOMAS KINKADEE
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Each intricately sculpted
building illuminates
from within

It Moves!



Just flip the switch to see the
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train circle the base

Four 3-D village
buildings, a pond,
bridge and
10 villagers nestle
within the sparkling
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Shown much smaller than
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of about 10 inches high.
AC adapter included.

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Three holiday treasures in one ...
exclusively from Bradford Editions!

Never was a snowman more filled with holiday spirit! The "Thomas Kinkadee White Christmas" Masterpiece Edition Crystal Snowman features shimmering, hand-crafted crystal, illuminated village sculpture and a nostalgic, *moving* holiday train ... for the first time ever!

Superior hand-crafting.

This snowman stands an impressive 10 inches high to let his cheerful personality come shining through. A hand-painted, 3-D Thomas Kinkadee village, tucked within the crystal outer shell, makes this snowman a holiday treasure inside and out. There's a lighted church, cozy homes and shops, plus a locomotive train that circles around below on the base! Just flip the switch to set the holiday train in motion. The silvery scarf, mittens, lantern and name plaque make this grandly sized sculpture truly magnificent.

A superb value; order now! Limit 1 per customer.

Order the "Thomas Kinkadee White Christmas" snowman today at only \$99.99*, payable in three installments of \$33.33 each, the first due before shipment. You need send no money now. Just return your Reservation Application. Our unconditional, 365-day money-back guarantee assures your 100% satisfaction. You risk nothing. Don't wait, return your Reservation Application today!

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RESERVATION APPLICATION

YES. Please reserve the "Thomas Kinkadee White Christmas" Masterpiece Edition Crystal Snowman as described in this announcement.
Limit: 1 per customer.

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Mr. Mrs. Ms. _____

Name (Please Print Clearly)

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*Plus a total of \$14.99 shipping and service. **15-00764-001-E08103**
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photo by Chase Lauer/UMG

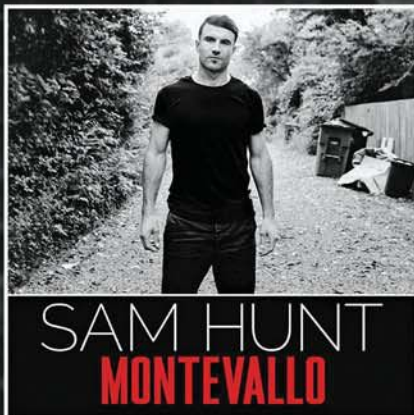
SAM HUNT is flying high with his No. 1 album, new single and all the chatter they're creating.

GAME CHANGER

Story by Katy Lindenmuth

When Sam Hunt takes the stage at LP Field on June 11, his CMA Music Festival audience will be a little bit bigger than last year's—actually, it'll be nearly 250 times bigger. In 2014, he played a free midnight gig at the cramped Silver Dollar Saloon (max capacity: 250) in downtown Nashville after the stadium lights had clunked off, signaling the end of the day's official events. But despite his relative obscurity back then, a crowd of heat-exhausted country music fans showed up for his after-hours set.

"Last year we were brand-new and didn't think a lot of people knew who we were," Sam tells *Nash Country Weekly* in his thick Georgia drawl. "That's the good thing about CMA Fest: the people who come to town are the fans who know everybody who's out and who the up-and-coming artists are."



Over the past year, Sam has transformed from that buzzy on-the-rise artist into a certified star straddling both country and pop radio—as well as a dizzying array of other genres. Last October, he released his debut album, *Montevallo*, which went No. 1 and has so far produced two hit singles: the slick

late-night jam "Leave the Night On," followed by the slower, darker "Take Your Time." (He's the first artist to arrive with back-to-back No. 1 singles since 2012.) Capitalizing on that momentum, he sold out his first-ever headlining tour within minutes, and he was a Best New Artist nominee at the Academy of Country Music Awards in April. When he visited *Nash Country Weekly* to

talk about his latest single, "House Party," he was in between stops on Lady Antebellum's Wheels Up Tour, where he's sharing opener duties with Hunter Hayes.



Before he was country's hottest new star, Sam played quarterback for the UAB Blazers and grew up hunting in rural Georgia (left).



SAM HUNT CONTINUED

None of that, though, is how Sam gauges his own success.

"I sense how it's growing based off how many people come out to the shows, how many songs they know that they're singing back," Sam says. "And it's cool to see within just two or three months of the record coming out, people singing the bridge of track nine, word for word. You've had to live with the record and listen to it multiple times to know those lyrics."

For the uninitiated, the lines he's referencing are, *Mama's prayers and Daddy's speech / Front porch philosophies / A little too young and dumb to see / Just what it all meant to me*. Sam's earliest fans have known those lyrics long before they were able to download *Montevallo*. They're from the song "Raised on It," an homage to down-home, back-roads living that Sam released independently—appropriately via mixtape—before signing with MCA Nashville.

"We kind of had this underground thing going on for a little while that really helped," Sam explains. "I

feel like people were really proud to share our music with other people, and I think that's important."

After all, it was through the sharing of music that Sam developed his own musical style. On *Montevallo*, Sam takes country's most basic ingredient—sentiments about growing up and experiencing life in the South—and filters it through all the genres he's been exposed to over the past 30 years. There's the '90s country that was inescapable in his rural hometown of Cedartown, Ga., the soul and Americana influences from his tight-knit circle of family and friends, and eventually the rap and hip-hop from his football teammates at University of Alabama at Birmingham. Somewhere along the way, EDM and mainstream pop also wafted in. It's a truly fascinating phenomenon and you might need to listen to *Montevallo* a few times to fully process—and appreciate—what's going on. There's a bass line inspired by R&B's Ginuwine in the chorus of "Break Up in a Small Town," for example, and the album closer, "Speakers," is a John Mayer-like recollection of sexy times (in a truck, of

G&A football photo by Streeter Lecka/Getty Images; Sam & Joan by M.J.T./AdMedia/Corbis; Mark, Billy, Sam & Josh by Annie Stubbs; all other photos courtesy Sam Hunt social media



Sam can hang with rapper G-Eazy or Chili from TLC (above left), but isn't too cool for his mom, who accompanied him to the 50th annual ACM Awards in Arlington, Texas (above right).

course). The result is unexpected enough to be refreshing, safe enough to be radio-friendly—and exactly why Sam continues to score with listeners and critics alike. Well . . . at least most of them (see sidebar, page 44).

Sam Hunt is the real-life version of the film industry's dream-guy stereotype: handsome (note the chiseled jaw), thoughtful and creative (he was a philosophy major), popular (yet in a nonthreatening way), athletic (the collegiate football thing), modest ("I'm not that great of a guitar player"). He even took his mother as his date to the ACMs. With that kind of persona, and the kinds of fans it attracts, he easily could've taken the oft-traveled route of his country peers: stand there and look good; let other people do the songwriting for you.

Instead, he's established himself as not just one of country's most innovative new artists but one who actually writes his own stuff. That skill is actually how he got his start in the industry, after graduating



The Golden Touch

Before he jumped into artist territory, **SAM HUNT** was a successful songwriter on Music Row. Co-penning these three hits secured his spot in the industry and paved the way for his next career move.

"Come Over"

KENNY CHESNEY

Teaming up with Shane McAnally and Josh Osborne proved so successful on this 2012 smash that Sam continues to collaborate with them in any way he can. The trio wrote Sam's first two singles from *Montevallo*, "Leave the Night On" and "Take Your Time," and Shane co-produced the album.

"Cop Car"

KEITH URBAN

Written with Zach Crowell—another co-producer on *Montevallo*—and Matt Jenkins, this 2014 hit is one of Keith's most experimental in terms of subject matter, instrumentation and production. The song was so personal to Sam that he included it on his own album later that year.

"We Are Tonight"

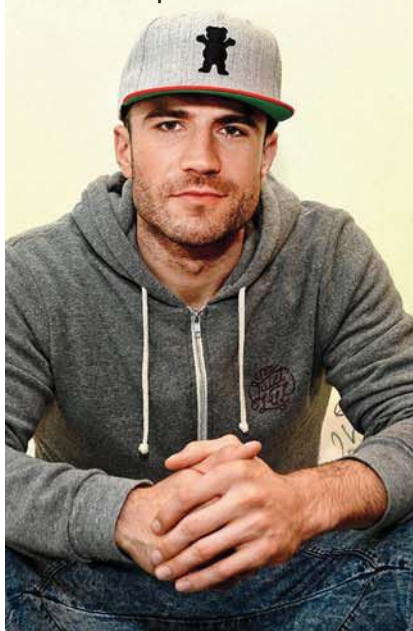
BILLY CURRINGTON

Billy didn't just record this track and take it to No. 1 last year—he named his fifth studio album after it. Sam, a big fan of Billy's, shared writing credits with Marc Beeson and his good friend Josh Osborne.



Sam's Sound

Much of what's been written about Sam's music debates its actual, well, countryness. The drum machines, the sing-talking, the overall modern sound—some critics have flat-out refused to include him in the genre in which he's being marketed. In an interview with *FADER* last year, Sam defended his country integrity: "Just because my sound doesn't sound like the people who have come before me doesn't mean I'm not educated and not appreciative and respectful toward all of those artists," he said. "The devices that I've used in my songwriting are traditional. As long as we're singing about a country lifestyle, and as long as there is truth in the lyrics, storytelling, and the visual images that have always shown up in country—for me that's what keeps it country." The only thing he forgot to add is a mic drop.



SAM HUNT CONTINUED

from UAB and facing two very different career routes: pro football or country music. He chose the latter, moved to Nashville and eventually found serious success by penning hits for Kenny Chesney and Keith Urban. In songs like "Cop Car," you can see his signature brand of storytelling beginning to form: it's about taking a specific personal experience and churning out a song that's relatable, all while evading the standard country clichés. ("Cop Car" celebrates the freedom in a woman's blue eyes rather than her tanned legs.) His success as a writer prompted another internal debate—whether to make the leap and record his own music.

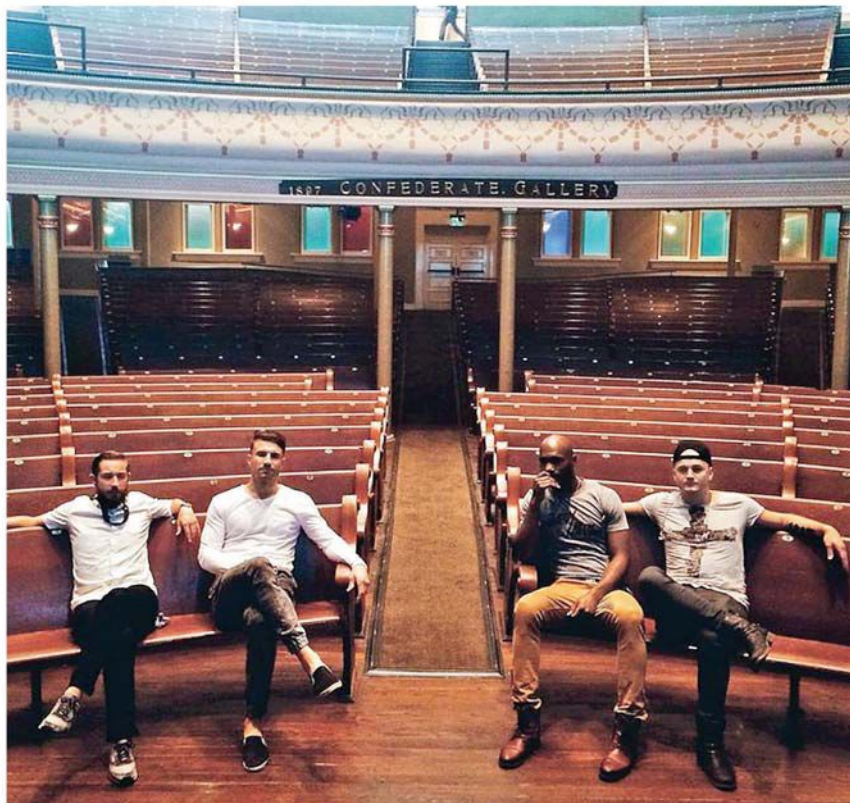
"Fortunately, I was able to have enough success to create that debate," Sam says. "But I didn't know how long it would last because songwriting is so finicky—you could get a couple cuts

one year and then you might wait 10, 15, 20 years before it happens [again], if at all. I just knew as an artist I could put out more songs."

Shortly after last year's CMA Fest, he released "Leave the Night On," which quickly became one of the summer's biggest country hits. He says the subsequent single, "Take Your Time," is "just a song about a guy talking to a girl, and that happens all the time, everywhere." What makes it stand out is the vocal style featured prominently throughout the track. It's been dubbed "sing-talking," and it's not rapping, not freestyling—it's exactly what it sounds like. Sam launches into the track with a two-verse spoken soliloquy to a girl who caught his eye, then rides into the melodic chorus. (The song was paired with a Tim Mattia-directed video that departs from the song's guy-meets-gal story line and instead explores a relation-



(Below from left) Sam and his band members Josh Sales, Tyrone Carreker and Josh Burkett picked the best seats in the house at the Ryman Auditorium, which they could only dream about while they were onstage playing in 2014.



ship marred by domestic abuse.) Sam's new single, "House Party," which dropped last month, is a return to the lighthearted, more straightforward singsongy fare.

"When I was writing [*Montevallo*] I never really played live much, so my natural tendency is to sit down and write ballads and slower songs," Sam says. "But I've realized the value of having fun, happy, up-tempo songs when I play live."

As does his audience: whenever he plays "House Party," the crowd erupts into its own little singalong soiree—and Sam sometimes jumps into the crowd to join them.

The day after his *Nash Country Weekly* interview, Sam hopped back onto Lady A's Wheels Up Tour with a show at the Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre in St. Louis. This is his most extensive tour to date, he says, and the venues are the biggest he's ever played. (Hollywood Casino's capacity: 20,000.) He's

treating it as a learning experience and studying every aspect of it.

"Hopefully one day we'll be fortunate enough to go on a tour like what Lady A has on the road—it wasn't long ago that we were in a van with a little trailer," he says.

He's also appreciating the even broader audience coming to the shows, which includes fans who've followed Lady Antebellum since 2006 and teens toting homemade Hunter Hayes posters.

"My favorite thing about the live show and the people who are coming out is that they're not the same people," he says. "They're different ages, different genders and ethnicities, different backgrounds—you can just tell there are people coming together for this one cause who wouldn't normally run into each other."

On each stage he steps on, Sam's set is simple: It's just his band (guitarists Tyrone Carreker

and Josh Burkett plus drummer Josh Sales) and a backdrop announcing his name in gigantic block letters. Wardrobe-wise, he rotates a few solid-color T-shirts and flat-brim hats, which is basically what he wears offstage. And when he's not playing the guitar or borrowing Sales' drumsticks to hammer out a few beats, he kind of just stands there—no hip shaking or other stage antics. Come to think of it, there's no exploiting sex appeal whatsoever, anywhere in public. He's out there specifically to make the best music he can.

"I truthfully don't have a great interest in being the guy . . ." he begins, then trails off.

On the cover of *Nash Country Weekly*?

"I'm flattered and so glad to be here," he says with a laugh, "but that wasn't what motivated me." **NCW**

ON THE ROAD

THE WOMEN OF NOW

KELSEA BALLERINI
and **JANA KRAMER**
are ready to roar.

STORY BY TRICIA DESPRES

PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY HIATT





A few hours before Kelsea Ballerini and Jana Kramer will take the stage in front of a sold-out crowd at Joe's Bar in Chicago as part of CMT's Next Women of Country Tour, the two ladies are acting like a couple of besties, taking selfies and complimenting each other about what they are wearing.

There's even a whisper between the two as they plan a way to sneak in a quick shopping trip before showtime.

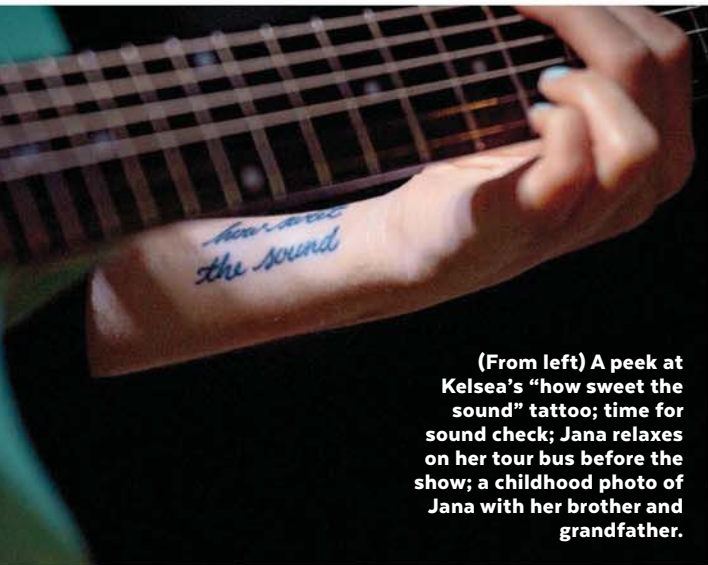
Yet the most striking thing about these two on this rainy afternoon is that they are both breathtakingly and somewhat effortlessly beautiful. But more important, they are both ultra-talented, with each currently enjoying successful singles.

Besides making sure their hair looks good for today's photo shoot and their ear buds are working correctly at sound check, there are other worries. For Kelsea, it's the nervousness surrounding her first arena show the very next day as an opener on Lady Antebellum's Wheels Up Tour. For Jana, it's the fact that her wedding dress came in two sizes too small.

They shrug their shoulders. There is plenty of time to worry about that later.

For now, as they get ready to retreat to their respective tour buses, the two instinctively lock arms, perhaps in a sign of solidarity and girl power or perhaps in a sign that they have each other's backs. Or maybe, just maybe, it's a sign that they know the hurdles that lie in front of them in this male-dominated country music industry.

"She is a lot younger than I am," Jana, 31, says matter-of-factly, a sly smirk coming from the side of her mouth as Kelsea, 21, walks off into the distance. "I want to take her—not under my wing—but just be that someone she can come to if she needs someone to talk to. I can kind of show her the ropes and tell her what to do and not to do. God knows we are all in this together."



(From left) A peek at Kelsea's "how sweet the sound" tattoo; time for sound check; Jana relaxes on her tour bus before the show; a childhood photo of Jana with her brother and grandfather.



BALLERINI'S BREAKTHROUGH

"The code is in here somewhere," says Kelsea, calmly searching for the combination of numbers and letters that will allow her to open the door to her spanking-new tour bus. "I'm still getting comfortable in here. I mean, I don't even know how to work the lights or the air conditioning, so I might be spending a whole lot of time in the cold and in the dark."

The blond beauty hailing from Knoxville, Tenn., laughs loudly, showing off not only her authenticity and youthful energy, but also an obvious excitement surrounding a career that has been moving at warp speed thanks to her single "Love Me Like You Mean It" and debut album *The First Time*.

"I find every moment I can to still be a kid," she says, slouching down into a tan couch that has not yet gotten comfortable.

Surrounding her on the bus are

little pieces of home, from boho glass candles from Urban Outfitters ("Moonsparkle is my favorite") to a monogrammed towel sitting neatly in the kitchen ("My bus driver made that for me—isn't that amazing?").

Indeed, what is amazing is the speed in which the girl who started writing songs at 12 and moved to Nashville at 15 and signed a publishing deal at 19 has become one of the most promising new voices in country music. "I can't believe my life right now," says Kelsea, who is up for Breakthrough Video of the Year for her hit "Love Me Like You Mean It" at the upcoming CMT Music Awards. "Sure there were periods of time in this journey where nothing was happening and it felt like it was taking forever to break through. But the last year and a half has been a total whirlwind. When the ball started rolling, it started rolling fast."

JANA'S PRESHOW RITUAL

CALMING MUSIC:

"I know it sounds crazy, but calming music actually

helps me re-center myself before a show."

VOCAL WARM-UP:

"I wish I could say it's involved and thorough, but it's not. It's short and usually rushed, but helps me immensely in terms of

making sure my voice is ready."

PRAYER:

"Prayer helps me not worry so much before going out onstage. After a prayer, I can have the faith to just go out there and be me."





Yet Kelsea says she is determined to stay grounded, whether that is via frequent conversations with her mom ("She always tells me to remember who I am") to dancing without inhibition when she thinks no one else is looking ("Music pumps me up") or pulling up the meet-and-greet pictures she still has on her phone from when she was just a country fan.

"I spent a lot of time in meet-and-greet lines as a fan," she says with a laugh, reaching for her phone to pull up a few. "I think being in that position for so long taught me how to be a fan as much as it taught me how to be an artist who wants to always connect with them the best way I can."

And that she does, whether it's snapping a pic with a fan or sticking around to sign autographs at her merchandise table. "The moments when I have to pinch myself lately have been onstage," she

says. "I'm just still getting used to people knowing the words to my single, and now people know the words to my album. I remember writing those songs and wondering if anyone would ever hear them. And now to know that people are hearing them and really listening to them is crazy."

KRAMER'S CRAFT

On a rainy day in Chicago custom-made for writing a sad song, Jana finds herself just across the street from Kelsea, sitting cross-legged on the bed in the back of her tour bus. "Maybe the song is just that depressing of a song?" she asks as a songwriter frantically writes in her notebook and another one casually strums his guitar. "Maybe we should stop fighting that and just go with it."

Sitting alongside a framed picture of her grandfather and brother, the self-proclaimed per-

KELSEA'S PRESHOW RITUAL

CHECK SOCIAL MEDIA:

"I love to search the hashtag #LoveMeLikeYouMeanIt and see

what people are doing with my song. I always try to comment back to them."

PUMP-UP PLAYLISTS:

"I have music that specifically helps me get ready for a show, whether that's a little 'Baby Got Back' or some

vintage Shania Twain or Britney Spears."

BAND BONDING:

"As a band, we like to put our hands together and just scream. And then we usually take a selfie, or a 'Kelfie,' as I like to call it."

KELSEA AND JANA CONTINUED



Kelsea takes the stage to the delight of the crowd; (right, from top) she reads *Nash Country Weekly's* digital edition on the bus; the stage is set at Joe's Bar; a quick "Kelfie" for a couple of fans.



fectionist seems as if she can instinctively feel the hours dwindling before showtime and before the Michigan native will have to put her earrings back on and begin an onslaught of preshow duties. On this particular day, those duties include a meet-and-greet session and a televised interview alongside Cody Alan for CMT's *Hot 20 Countdown*, a show that will undoubtedly include the breathtakingly gorgeous video for Jana's single "I Got the Boy."

"I've been trying to write a song

about my high school sweetheart forever," she remembers of her first encounter with the lyrics of "I Got the Boy," which will be featured on Jana's new album in the fall. "When I finally found this song, I instantly fell in love with it. I mean, everyone has that person, whether you dated that person for a short time or a long time or whether you lost the boy or you got the boy and the man." She laughs. "Everyone has a story about one or another or both."

Her eyes brighten as she talks.

"I always like to see the reaction in the crowd after I sing, *I got the boy and she got the man*," she says, smiling. "I can practically hear them say, 'Oh my gosh, that's so good.' I mean, I'm just really proud of the entire new album. This album is going to truly show who I am at this moment."

Because who she is at the moment is a woman who finally is becoming more known for her country singing career instead of her prior acting career. She's also a woman who is currently in love, as



Jana lets 'em have it; (left, from top) photo time with fans; Jana's set list; looking as radiant as ever during a radio interview.



evidenced by her engagement and marriage to football player Michael Caussin. “When I am in love, I write more breakup songs, and when I’m not, I write love songs,” says Jana. “I have no idea why, but I do know that I am still trying to outwrite myself on this new record. I’m still making sure that this new record will be my best.”

But is this the best time as a female to put out a country record?

“I truly believe the tides are turning,” Jana explains. “There are so many amazing women out

there right now in country music and I feel like our songs are really connecting with people. If a fan can relate to a song, they are going to listen to that song and it’s going to touch you in a more concrete way. That’s the powerful thing about music.”

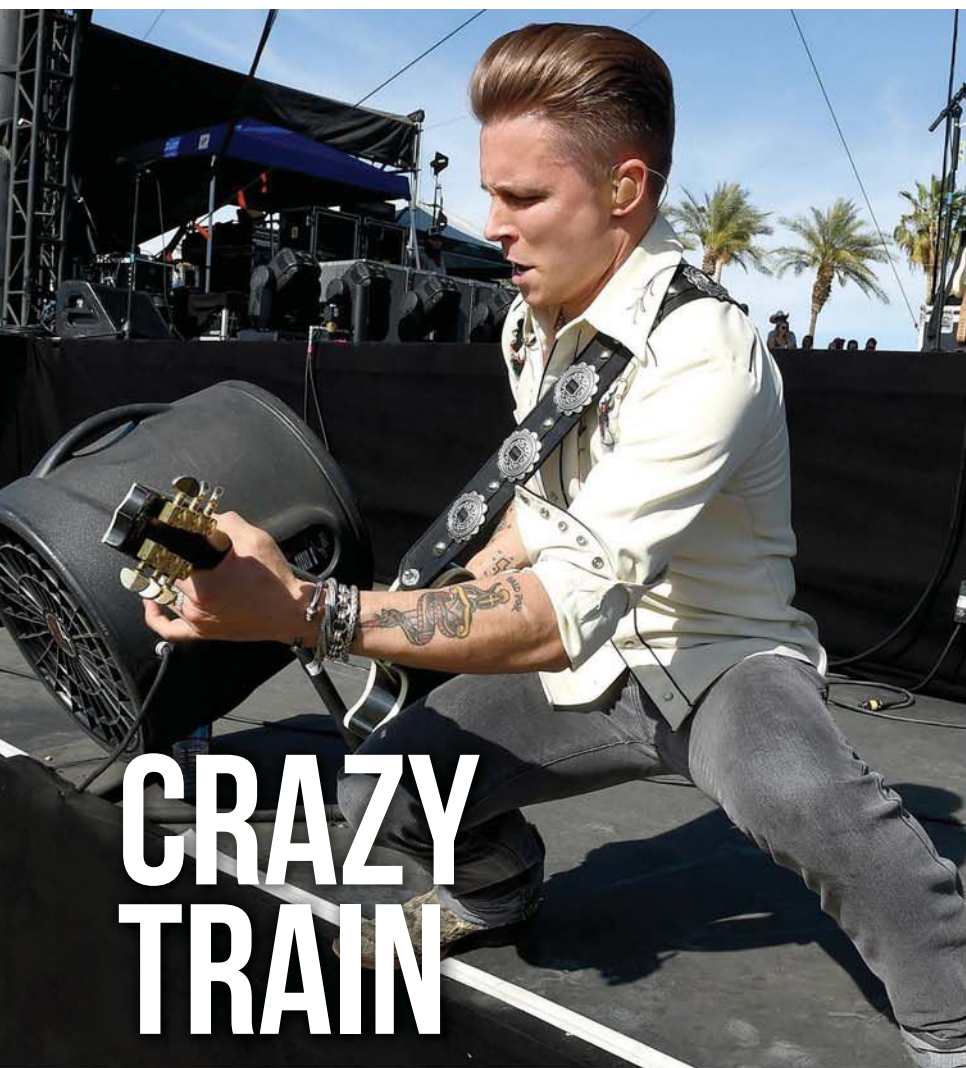
SHOWTIME

Minutes before showtime, the dark venue is alive with an enthusiastic crowd eager to see Kelsea and Jana. There is a charge in the air, and everyone in the room can feel it.

“Tastes change when it comes to what you want to listen to on the radio,” Jana says. “I feel like there are always going to be less women, but I don’t think that has anything to do with us not having better songs or anything like that. Unfortunately, that’s just how it is in the country format. I feel like there are a lot of great women that are coming in poised to make their mark.”

And with that, Kelsea bounds upon the stage to make her mark, as Jana waits in the wings.

And the crowd roars. **NCW**



CRAZY TRAIN

Rhett Akins knows a few things about being young and crazy, having grown up in the music business as one of the rising stars of the '90s. Maybe that's why he always kept this memorable song hook in his back pocket: *how am I ever gonna get to be old and wise if I ain't ever young and crazy?* Rhett saved that idea for the right day, which happened to be the first time he col-

"YOUNG & CRAZY" FRANKIE BALLARD

WRITERS: Rhett Akins, Ashley Gorley, Shane McAnally

laborated with Ashley Gorley and Shane McAnally.

With Ashley at the piano and Rhett and Shane with guitars in hand, the three began their brain-

storming process to see what ideas they could spark, and Rhett threw out his "Young & Crazy" hook. "As soon as I said that, Ashley started banging something out on the piano," remembers Rhett. "The next thing you know, we had a song."

"I know people say this a lot, but that one really did write itself," notes Ashley. "Rhett's country wisdom with that hook just really set us up for success."

However, like every song that gets written in Nashville, nobody knows where it's going to end up. "We thought it was good, but you just don't know what's going to happen with songs," Rhett says.

"Young & Crazy" was demoed and pitched around town, eventually landing in the hands of Frankie Ballard, who was in the process of picking out songs for his sophomore album, *Sunshine & Whiskey*. After two singles were released from the project, the songwriting trio began to give up any hope that their tune would make it to country radio. But to their surprise, Frankie released "Young & Crazy" as the third single from the album.

"It was awesome because we just forgot about the song after a while and moved on," Rhett says. "Then it comes out as a single and it's been flying up the charts!"

"It's funny," adds Ashley. "Once you hear the artist singing your song that you wrote, you think it was meant to be that way all along. We all felt that when we heard Frankie singing it. It's been awesome to experience. Everything about this song has been a lot of fun."

ALANNA CONAWAY

Double Threat

SHANE MCANALLY has become one of the hottest songwriters in Nashville over the past several years. Shane is also a talented producer for the likes of **OLD DOMINION**, **SAM HUNT** and **KACEY MUSGRAVES**, whose new sophomore album, *Pageant Girl*, drops on June 23. Check out these hits he helped write:

"LEAVE THE NIGHT ON"
Sam Hunt

"DOWNTOWN"
Lady Antebellum
"ALONE WITH YOU"
Jake Owen

"BETTER DIG TWO"
The Band Perry
"MAMA'S BROKEN HEART"
Miranda Lambert
"COME OVER"
Kenny Chesney



Frankie by Kevin Winter/Getty Images; Shane by Alyse Garkley/Schmidt Relations

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"WILDFIRE"
"HOLLYWOOD"
"BLUEBONNETS
(JULIA'S SONG)"
"HEYDAY TONIGHT"

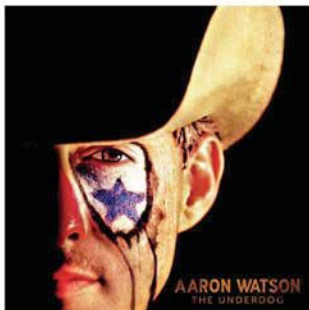
AGE
38

BIGGEST HIT
"THAT LOOK"

It was the "who" heard around the country. When Aaron Watson made an impressive No. 1 debut on *Billboard's* Top Country Albums chart with *The Underdog*, most on Nashville's Music Row were scratching their heads. "A lot of people have been calling me 'up and coming,' and I'm quick to correct them," says Aaron. "It's more like 'slow and steady' because I'm 15 years, 12 albums and 2,000-plus shows into this." He's not being braggadocious. He's tickled and humbled by the newfound fame. "It was a neat feeling that my album was the top-selling country album in all of country music because I'm just this guy from West Texas that writes my songs."

Aaron is a lot more than that. He has collaborated with Willie Nelson, Ray Benson, Billy Joe Shaver and more. His albums

Angels and Outlaws and *The Road & The Rodeo* both debuted in the Top 5 on *Billboard's* Heatseekers chart, his 11th album, *Real Good Time*, debuted in the Top 10 on *Billboard's* Country Albums chart and he has more than a half-dozen



No. 1s on the Texas Music Chart.

And all those numbers don't mean diddly-squat to his fans. He dips his head a bit and says, "That's probably the greatest thing. I've never won any awards for my songwriting, but when people tell me that they played my song 'Barbed Wire Halo' at their grandpa's funeral, there's no greater compliment. Or when one of these little gals tells me they used one of the songs I wrote for my wife as their first dance at their wedding, that's wonderful."

Still, he wouldn't mind seeing a little love from country radio. Aaron worked with producer Keith Stegall (Alan Jackson) on *The Underdog*, and in a world that has been infiltrated by drum loops, affected voices and rappy recitations, the pair held tight to fiddle, steel and warm vocals. "When I talk about

music, I always talk about jelly," he laughs. "You ready? How awful of a world would it be if there was only one kind of jelly? If there was only grape jelly, you'd be missing out on strawberry jelly, apricot jelly, peach jelly. I don't know about marmalade. Girl, that's a whole different topic. There's enough love to go around. I think the route that I've taken makes a person very grateful for those kinds of things because I understand there's a lot of competition, a lot of yellow tape, a lot of politics. But I've got a new record that has hits on it, and I've never said that with my previous 11 albums."

Aaron keeps it in perspective. "I'm sure when every artist gets a No. 1 they're excited about it," he says. "But it took me 15 years to get here, so to say I feel grateful and blessed is kind of an understatement. That's something nobody can ever take away from me. And they can't take away that I got to sing with Willie Nelson."

That's enough to make anyone a little "jelly." **TAMMY RAGUSA**



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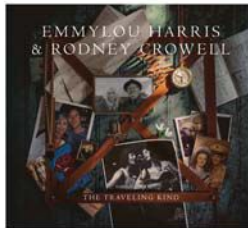
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TOP 10 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	JEKYLL + HYDE ZAC BROWN BAND
2	4	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
3	—	NASHVILLE: THE MUSIC OF SEASON 3, VOLUME 2 • SOUNDTRACK
4	2	TRAVELLER CHRIS STAPLETON
5	3	LOVE SOMEBODY REBA MCENTIRE
6	5	SUFFER IN PEACE TYLER FARR
7	9	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
8	—	THE TRAVELING KIND EMMYLOU HARRIS & RODNEY CROWELL
9	8	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
10	10	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN



Tyler Farr scores his first *Billboard* Country Airplay chart-topper with the lead single from his sophomore release, *Suffer in Peace*.



Friends and collaborators for more than 40 years, Emmylou Harris and Rodney Crowell arrive at No. 8 with their second duets album.

TOP 10 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	2	A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR TYLER FARR
2	3	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
3	4	SMOKE A THOUSAND HORSES
4	5	SIPPIN' ON FIRE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
5	1	RAISE 'EM UP KEITH URBAN FEAT. ERIC CHURCH
6	7	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
7	9	LITTLE TOY GUNS CARRIE UNDERWOOD
8	11	BABY BE MY LOVE SONG EASTON CORBIN
9	10	DIAMOND RINGS AND OLD BARSTOOLS TIM MCGRAW WITH CATHERINE DUNN
10	13	SANGRIA BLAKE SHELTON

© 2015, BILLBOARD/e5 GLOBAL MEDIA/NIELSEN ENTERTAINMENT

TOP 10 CMT VIDEOS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	3	DRINKING CLASS LEE BRICE
2	2	SAY YOU DO DIERKS BENTLEY
3	4	RAISE 'EM UP KEITH URBAN FEAT. ERIC CHURCH
4	5	A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR TYLER FARR
5	1	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT
6	6	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
7	8	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
8	7	LITTLE RED WAGON MIRANDA LAMBERT
9	9	SIPPIN' ON FIRE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
10	13	SMOKE A THOUSAND HORSES

SOURCE: CMT

TOP 10 GAC VIDEOS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	GIRL CRUSH LITTLE BIG TOWN
2	3	SANGRIA BLAKE SHELTON
3	2	RAISE 'EM UP KEITH URBAN FEAT. ERIC CHURCH
4	4	LITTLE RED WAGON MIRANDA LAMBERT
5	6	LITTLE TOY GUNS CARRIE UNDERWOOD
6	7	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
7	8	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT
8	9	SIPPIN' ON FIRE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
9	11	DIAMOND RINGS AND OLD BARSTOOLS TIM MCGRAW WITH CATHERINE DUNN
10	10	AIN'T WORTH THE WHISKEY COLE SWINDELL

SOURCE: GAC

TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY



The highly anticipated follow-up to Alabama Shakes' 2012 debut is the most-spun Americana album in the land.

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	SOUND & COLOR ALABAMA SHAKES
2	2	THE RUFFIAN'S MISFORTUNE RAY WYLIE HUBBARD
3	6	LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL JD McPHERSON
4	3	THE FIREWATCHER'S DAUGHTER BRANDI CARLILE
5	5	MONO THE MAVERICKS
6	4	EDGE OF THE SUN CALEXICO
7	7	SECOND HAND HEART DWIGHT YOAKAM
8	8	SOMETHING IN THE WATER POKEY LAFARGE
9	9	STILL THE KING: CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF BOB WILLS • ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL
10	12	SUNDOWN OVER GHOST TOWN EILEEN JEWELL

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART



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Rachel Coontz of
Fort Worth, Texas, with
MIRANDA LAMBERT



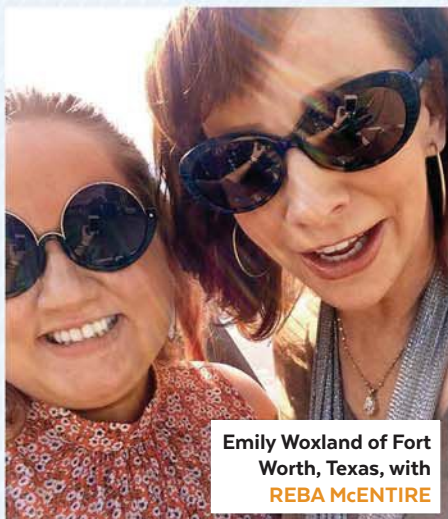
CANAAN SMITH with Tzippy Farkas and Judy K.
of Brooklyn, N.Y.



SAM HUNT
with Jennifer Ritchie
of New Baltimore, Mich.



DWIGHT YOAKAM
with Tracy McFadden of
Charlottesville, Va.



Emily Woxland of Fort
Worth, Texas, with
REBA McENTIRE



Libby Smith of
Beaumont, Texas,
with **JASON ALDEAN**

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PUZZLED

By John Reiman

HOW DOES THAT SONG GO?

Let's test your musical memory. Below are excerpts from six popular country songs, ranging from 1991 to 2014. See how well you know the lyrics by filling in the missing words.

1. "Don't Rock the Jukebox" by Alan Jackson, 1991

Don't rock the jukebox /
I wanna hear George Jones /
'Cause my heart ain't ready for ____

2. "Check Yes or No" by George Strait, 1995

Do you love me, do you wanna be
my friend? /
And if you do /
Well then don't be afraid to take me

3. "Chicken Fried" by Zac Brown Band, 2008

You know I like my chicken fried /
Cold beer on a ____ /
A pair of jeans that fit just right /
And the radio up

4. "Some Beach" by Blake Shelton, 2004

You're not gonna feel a thing, we'll
give you some
novocaine /
That tooth will be fine in a minute or
two /
But he stuck that needle down deep
in my gum /
And he started drillin' before ____

5. "Last Name" by Carrie Underwood, 2008

It started off "Hey cutie, where are
you from?" /
And then it turned into "Oh no! What
____"

6. "Automatic" by Miranda Lambert, 2014

If you had something to say /
You'd write it on a piece of paper /
Then you put a stamp on it /
And they'd get it ____



ANSWERS: 1. THE ROLLING STONES 2. BY THE HAND 3. FRIDAY NIGHT 4. I WAS NUMB 5. HAVE I DONE 6. THREE DAYS LATER

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Copy Editors
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ADVERTISING SALES

Publisher
Jeff Meltesen

For all advertising inquiries contact
615-727-6952
jmeltesen@countryweekly.com

Cumulus Media, Inc.
3280 Peachtree Road, NW, Suite 2300
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*We get by with a
little help from
our friends.*



Katy Lindenmuth

is a freelance writer based in Nashville. She has written for *Billboard*, *Rolling Stone Country* and *People* and was previously an editor at *Teen Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan* in NYC.



Alanna Conaway

first got into the music business at age 11 by snapping pics. She eventually transitioned into the world of writing and has been penning stories for *Nash Country Weekly* since 2002.



Jim Wright

has shot for the likes of *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone* and many other magazines around the world. Beyond his advertising and celebrity work he is also an award-nominated music video director.



Timothy Hiatt

is a photographer based in Chicago, but he has been known to travel to the various corners of the world based solely on the promise of cashable checks or actual hard currency.



Tricia Despres

turned a strong love for music into a full-time profession, covering country music for publications such as *Nash Country Weekly* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* since 2010.



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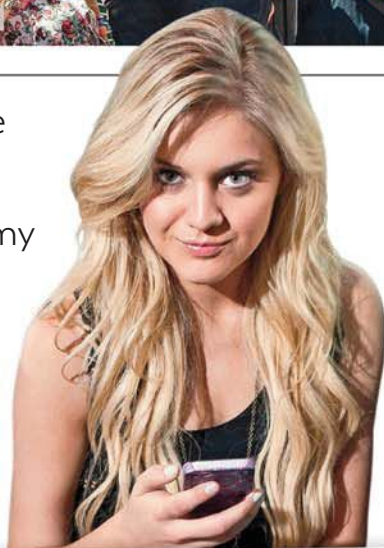


"I try not to think about that part too much. I do enjoy it. That's just a part of this whole thing. Being so visible and just being in this position. Like I said, it's just part of it no matter who you are if you are getting into this business. Hopefully it's because they enjoy the music, and that's the point."

SAM HUNT on making the girls swoon

"Twitter is a downtime thing for me. When I respond on Twitter, people freak out. It's my favorite thing. When **Taylor** tweeted me, I had a full-out freakout. If I can give other people a sliver of how I felt that day, I want to."

KELSEA BALLERINI



TEMPERATURE GAUGE

WHAT'S HOT

CARRIE UNDERWOOD

was recently named as a late addition to Nashville's CMA Music Festival. The superstar will take the stage at LP Field on Saturday, June 13.



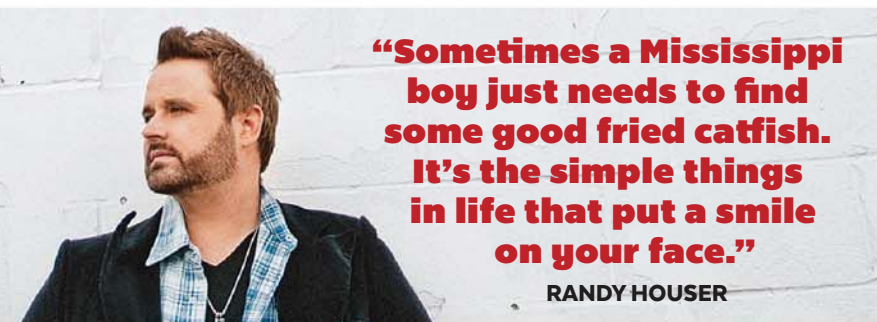
WHAT'S NOT

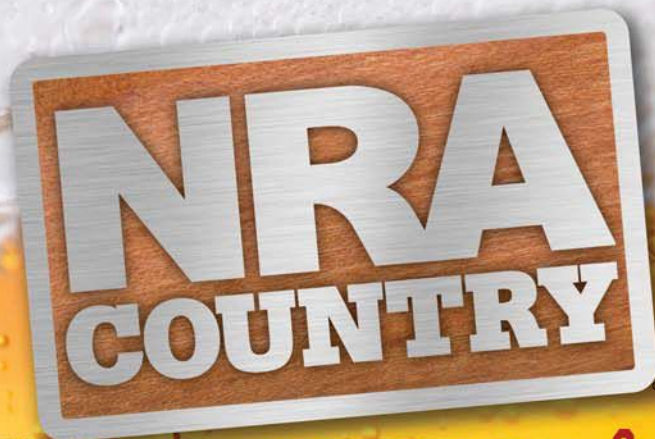
The FCC fined **iHEARTRADIO** \$1 million for broadcasting a fake emergency alert during a radio bit on **The Bobby Bones Show**.



"Sometimes a Mississippi boy just needs to find some good fried catfish. It's the simple things in life that put a smile on your face."

RANDY HOUSER





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